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EMERSON AND MAETERLINCK

Maeterlinck's admiration for Emerson has been frequently remarked upon. The dealers in literary intimacies have told of the well-worn and abundantly underscored edition of Emerson's essays in the private library of the Belgian author, and every reader who has sought a complete acquaintance with Maeterlinck's writings is familiar with the enthusiastic introduction which he contributed to a French translation of seven of Emerson's essays, published some twenty years ago. But, in general, it has seemed sufficient to the biographers, panegyrists, interpreters, and critics of Maeterlinck merely to list Emerson vaguely among the sages—the philosophers, mystics, transcendentalists, and prophets—to whom the elegant Flemish visionary and idealist is in some measure beholden for his ideas or with whom he would appear to have some sort of intellectual or temperamental affiliation. It is easy to be glib with names, and the numerous literary advertisers of Maeterlinck, especially in America, have exercised no reticence in their rather thinly erudite allusions to Plato, Plotinus, and Porphyry, Marcus Aurelius, Ruysbroeck the Admirable, Boehme, Swedenborg, Novalis, and divers others, including Coleridge, Ruskin, Carlyle, and Emerson. Whatever correspondence it may be possible to disclose between Maeterlinck and these various eminent sources of spiritual insight, it is certain that between him and Emerson in particular there are noteworthy similarities and equally significant differences. Both the resemblances and the unlikenesses are probably obvious enough to anyone who finds the time to regard the two men deliberately side by side, but it is perhaps not imper-

tinient to take special cognizance of them, with a view to venturing an opinion as to the relative longevity that the work of each of these purveyors of wisdom seems likely to enjoy.

It is, of course, broadly, the mystic in Emerson that Maeterlinck admires. "I believe, he says, with his characteristically jewelled rhetoric, "that the writings of the mystics are the purest diamonds of the wondrous treasure of humanity." But among these "purest diamonds" there are important varieties of color, form, size, number of facets, and appropriateness of setting. "Plato and Plotinus," he reminds one, "are above all, princes of dialectic. They reach mysticism through the science of reasoning. They make use of their discursive soul, and seem to mistrust their intuitive or contemplative soul." In the mediæval Ruysbroeck, on the contrary, that ecstatic saint, "we meet again the habits of Asiatic thought; the intuitive soul reigns supreme above the discursive purification of ideas by words." Emerson is neither a prince of dialectic nor an inspired monk wrapped into union with God. He is "the good morning shepherd of pale meadows, green with a new optimism, both natural and plausible. He does not lead us to the edge of a precipice. He does not make us go from the humble and familiar close, because the glacier, the sea, the eternal snows, the palace, the stable, the cheerless hearth of the poor, and the cot of the sick—all are found beneath the same heaven, purified by the same stars, and subjugated to the same infinite powers."

Maeterlinck was still a young man, with swift and uncertain poetic images whirling in his mind, when he thus praised the American seer. But his meaning is not obscure. It is emphasized by what he chants descriptively of three other masters of luminous insight. "Goethe accompanies our soul upon the shores of the sea of Serenity. Marcus Aurelius places our soul on the hill-side of an ideal humanity, its perfect excellence somewhat tiresome, and beneath too heavy a foliage of hopeless resignation. Carlyle, the spiritual brother of Emerson, who in this century has given us warning from the other end of the valley, has brought before us in lightning strokes, upon a background of shadow and storm, of an unknown, relentlessly strange, the only heroic moments of our being." Emerson has the strong calm of

Goethe, but is not set aloof by the resigned loftiness of Marcus Aurelius and is not smokily surrounded by the sulphurous storminess of Carlyle. More specifically, Emerson is admirable to Maeterlinck because he recognizes and reveals that "treasure of the humble," that "buried temple," that "unknown guest" which is the possession of every human soul. His is a timely voice eloquently declaring that, no matter how thickly the spirit of the lowliest or of the boldest man may be encrusted with skepticism or ignorance or error or evil, it wells divinely with unsuspected goodness and beauty. Emerson speaks with courage, "he has confidence in mystery." "Emerson has come to affirm simply this equal and secret grandeur of life. He has encompassed us with silence and with wonder. He has placed a shaft of light beneath the feet of the workman who leaves the workshop. . . . He is nearer than any other to our common life. He is the most attentive, the most assiduous, the most honest, the most scrupulous, and probably the most human of guides. He is the sage of commonplace days, and commonplace days are in sum the substance of our being." It is Emerson's gift to discover to men, without respect of persons, that "transcendental consciousness," that self which is "more profound and more inexhaustible than the self of passion or of pure reason."

Thus Maeterlinck congratulates Emerson benignly on his being a co-worker, a co-"interpreter," with himself. They would both be ministers of restoratives to the spiritually sick and of stimulants to the spiritually indolent. But they are not unbuttoned evangelists like Whitman, nor feverishly zealous revolutionists like Nietzsche, nor irascibly righteous pleaders like Ruskin, nor blessed dramatic visualists like Browning, nor gigantically earnest examiners like Tolstoy, nor coolly surprising philosophers like M. Bergson. They question the meaning of life closely and even passionately, but not with lowering brows and burning eyes, nor with the slow steady gaze of undeflected logical perception. Both are somewhat naïve in the "miscellaneous eclecticism" of their convictions, suggestions, recommendations, doctrines; their ideas are fresh and stimulating not because they are new, for they are almost all of ancient lineage, but because

they point in a direction different from that of the prevalent tendencies of their own time. They would both address all men without discrimination, but each of them thinks and speaks in a language intelligible, or at any rate attractively meaningful, only to an auditor somewhat select. Both are essentially poets, without the special order of genius to cast their utterances in adequate poetic form. Both are noble and sincere, but the one is perhaps too excellently wise and vaguely profound, the other too fluent and self-assured, to be quite readily approachable or freely companionable. Both are men of power, and both have conspicuous (though hardly regrettable) limitations. As mystic idealists they are of close kin; as makers of literature, though in some degree comparable, they stand far apart. The one is a moral liberator of vigorously imaginative intellect to whom æsthetic ends are never a temptation or a self-sufficing delight; the other is a conscious and original literary artist who finds his inspiration in the ideas germinated by a youthfully exploratory and frankly amateur philosophy.

Perhaps the most immediately striking point of resemblance between these two teacher-poets is their glorification of the precept of self-reliance. In Emerson "everything vibrates to that iron string." "A man should learn," he declares with the conviction, at once proud and humble, of one conscious of his own high spiritual gifts, "to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages." That gleam is the inflowing of God, or of Nature, which is the manifestation of God, or of the Over-Soul, which is the One, God and Nature and Soul of Man. If we will but learn to detect this light, Emerson assures us, we shall know that art, religion, political economy, institutions of all kinds, education of all forms—we shall know that whatever in the artificial world moves the passions or enters the mind can have no rightful dominance over the soul and can permanently color or discolor only the soul that fails to be master of itself. Man's spirit being infinite, all knowledge, all beauty lies within him, awaiting his discovery. Furthermore,—

"Save his own soul he has no star,
And sinks, except his own soul guide,
Helmless in middle turn of tide."

The words are Swinburne's, but they might almost have been Emerson's, and Maeterlinck is merely another voice proclaiming the same salvation. The only temple of justice lies buried in the heart of man. The poorest of human creatures, the most dull, most evil, most blind has yet within his soul a fountain of invisible goodness, may find there the inexhaustible "treasure of the humble," and entertains unawares that "unknown guest," that infinite consciousness which knows no time or space, no birth or death, no good or evil, but comprehends all those mysteries before which the finite intellect stands perpetually helpless and amazed. In the eyes of Maeterlinck and Emerson the life well lived is that in which the intellect is actively recognized to be no more than "a kind of phosphorescence playing over the inner sea" of the unfathomable and boundless soul, that in which the individual becomes more and more skilful in seizing those moments when his intuitive sense is alert to the truth that lies beyond the reach of all his lesser faculties.

The closer students of Emerson, however, especially Professor Woodberry, have pointed out that the American mystic's doctrine of self-reliance is really one of "God-reliance." The "egoistic will" is under the control of the "Over-Will" as the individual soul is merely a microcosmic representation, or outflowing, or division of the Over-Soul. The human will is as frail and captious and misleading as the intellect. It is only that inmost eye, intuitive vision, that can perceive, realize, apprehend the true, the beautiful, the good, that is, those universals sought and embraced by the whole soul, which is itself universal by nature. Hence Emerson, with all his romantic enthusiasm over the dignity and supreme value of the individual self, is yet, as the "friend and aider of those who would live in the spirit," one who counsels against particular ends, one who urges that in the affections we should seek to attain impersonal love, one who concerns himself not so much with particular reforms as with broad, general ideals of betterment—betterment for Man rather than for men and women, enlightenment for the human soul rather than for human souls. Maeterlinck the essayist is similarly concerned with universals. Maeterlinck the dramatist is more concerned with particulars, with the problems

that assail the spiritual self in the crucial moments of experience, in the hour of disillusioned love, the hour of bereavement, the hour of death. But in all his prose volumes he is intent, like Emerson, on securing for the individual who would "live in the spirit" liberty from all the impediments of tradition, precedent, convention, dogma, and whatever obstructs the progress of the soul towards the complete discernment of itself as the seat of true judgment and all living and deathless beauty. This passion for spiritual freedom carries him also into a large and well-beaten field of speculation which stirred Emerson's curiosity hardly at all: as to the immortality of the soul Maeterlinck admits no doubt; as to its nature he reasons with an engaging and fortifying plausibility. Our "unknown guest," which abides in us but transcends our physical, our temporal self, points to a consciousness after death that we have as yet no means of grasping, a consciousness that may be called cosmic, or simply infinite, or figuratively divine, and a consciousness which there is no reason to fear but every reason to desire. The idea of it would appear to be virtually the same as the idea of Emerson's Over-Soul.

For the mature Maeterlinck the idea of fate has no more terror or beauty than for Emerson. The author of *La Sagesse et la Destinée* is a very different sort of thinker, dreamer, and "interpreter" from the author of *La Princesse Maleine*, *Les Aveugles*, and *Pelléas et Mélisande*. There are, to be sure, powers about us and in us, the mysterious faculties of our "unknown guest," that we have as yet no means of understanding, and forces which, the more we master them, the more helplessly we are mastered by them—such forces as those liberated by our ingenuity in the invention and manufacture of the implements of war. But we carry within us a mysterious microcosmic epitome of all knowledge and all wisdom which, let it be fully discovered, makes us rulers of fortune, or destiny. "Be her empire never so great over all things external, she always must halt when she finds on the threshold a silent guardian of the inner life." Or as Emerson expresses it: "If we must accept Fate, we are not less compelled to affirm liberty, the significance of the individual, the grandeur of duty, the power of character." "Fate . . . is a

name for facts not yet passed under the fire of thought;—for causes which are unpenetrated.” There is really nothing external to us, for—“The smallest candle fills a mile with its rays, and the papillæ of a man run out to every star.” But this is not the whole of Emerson’s conception. There is a sense in which fate is all-powerful. “For if we give it the high sense in which the poets use it, even thought itself is not above Fate: that too must act according to eternal laws. . . .” “In its last and loftiest ascensions, insight itself, and the freedom of the will, is one of its obedient members.” But fate is attended and antagonized by power, because the world is a dual world of balance, of compensation. “To hazard the contradiction,—freedom is necessary.” Intellect, moral sentiment, and will, which is created by insight and affection working together, annul fate, for “a part of Fate is the freedom of man.” Maeterlinck is enamored, one may say, of the same time-worn idea. Emerson expresses it in epigrammatic sentences that glow in his prose pages and in his poetry like small live coals. Maeterlinck visualizes it in dramatic form or half-sings it in fluent, discursive paragraphs. Arielle, the “docile and familiar little fairy,” the “inner force,” the “subliminal self” of the sage magician Merlin, in *Joyzelle*, is the “neglected power which slumbers in every soul,” that inmost understanding which creates destiny and masters the world.

In general, the mysticism of Maeterlinck is much more argumentative than that of Emerson. The latest of his essays, those published in America as a volume with the title *The Unknown Guest*, have in large part a sober scientific plainness far removed in tone and effect from the luxuriantly imaginative ornateness of his first book, *Le Trésor des Humbles*, and the tendency through the four or five intervening volumes is toward a carefully rationalized coherence of thought and temperateness of expression. Maeterlinck delights in studying metaphysical problems with the same sort of calm laboratory scrutiny that he devotes to the life and intelligence of bees or of flowers. The essays on the past, luck, “the psychology of accident,” spiritualistic and theosophical doctrines and records of strange phenomena, the Elberfeld horses, and the findings of the Society for

Psychical Research—these in particular are marked by an attitude of mind, an organization of ideas, and a moderation of style different from anything to be found in Emerson. All of these writings are the product of a temperament that is essentially mystical, but in the imperfect, relative way of all seers whose vision consists in a compromise or a coöperation between direct spiritual perception and mathematically strict rational inquiry. The seer who is consistently and completely mystical, as Professor Santayana shows in his critical appreciation of Emerson, must be one who rejects everything relative, imagination as well as intellect, common sense, poetry, conscience—because nothing relative can seize the absolute, the one, the universal for which the mystic hungers and which he believes that he divines. Perhaps Ruysbroeck the Admirable in his most exalted moments, or William Blake in his times of most complete severance from all normal human experience, was not far from meeting the qualifications of this thoroughly consistent mystic. But in general the “interpreter,” especially in the modern world, who believes that “we live only by virtue of our transcendental being” will be very much of a relativist. He may be an abstruse and esoteric thinker like Coleridge or like Browning; a visionary like Shelley or Francis Thompson; a moral idealist and disillusionist like Ibsen; a very well-poised, very humanly wise, and very keenly humorous philosopher like William James. He may be a “good morning shepherd” like Emerson or a placid devotee of the mysterious like Maeterlinck. In any case he will be a relativist in whom cautious and canny intellect, venturesome and self-regaling imagination, moral intensity, æsthetic sensibility, and practical good sense are variously mixed by the play of circumstance and temperament. Maeterlinck inclines to be more argumentative than Emerson, not because there is more mind in his mysticism, but because there is less inspired assurance and no such genius for the flow of half-isolated images and ideas as the American sage possesses to a degree wholly unique.

Though neither Emerson nor Maeterlinck is, in the proper signification of the term, a philosopher, though neither of them has built up a body of doctrine or a comprehensively systematized order of ideas, yet both concern themselves, in one place

or another, with a good share of the vital questions with which philosophy deals. The attitude of the one towards religion is virtually identical with that of the other—an attitude aptly expressed by a familiar stanza from Rossetti's *Soothsayer*:—

Let lore of all Theology
Be to thy soul what it *can* be ;
But know,—the Power that fashions man
Measured not out thy little span
For thee to take the meting-rod
In turn, and so approve on God
Thy science of Theometry.

“Our young people,” says Emerson in one of those humorously pragmatic passages such as only so sane and beneficently independent a sage as he could write, “are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, predestination, and the like. . . . These are the soul’s mumps, and measles, and whooping-coughs, and those who have not caught them cannot describe their health or prescribe the cure.” Creeds are “a disease of the intellect.” All subservience to the dictates of formal religion stands in the way of that self-reliance which marks the true man. But—“Let a man believe in God, and not in names and places and persons.” “Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person, who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet forever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable.” For Maeterlinck, similarly, all positive religion is a hindrance to the soul’s perception of its own beauty and power; the man who accepts on faith the dictates of any doctrine thus limits his properly endless search of truth; the formal religions are all guilty of “narrowing the mystery of the universe.” And God is “perhaps only the most beautiful desire of our soul.” Maeterlinck would subscribe readily to Emerson’s confidence that “when we have broken our God of tradition, and ceased from our God of rhetoric, then may God fire the heart with His presence.”

To Kant religion was one kind of truth—a truth “theoretically problematical but practically certain.” Maeterlinck’s attitude toward science is somewhat similar to this; the attitude of Emerson significantly divergent. For the materials and the

processes of science Maeterlinck has the liveliest admiration, and yet he is sagacious enough to remind himself and his reader that after all science is "but a reassuring and conciliatory expression of our ignorance. Unless we make a discreet and expert use of scientific method, and guard ourselves against the errors of imperfect judgment and personal bias by maintaining a temper of scientifically critical skepticism, we cannot hope with any profit to explore those seeming approaches to the mystery that surrounds us which engage the zeal of the Society for Psychical Research and all its associations. Maeterlinck has read far and wide in the publications of the established natural sciences as well as in the records and speculations of investigators who are partly concerned with matters that lie over the border of ascertainable fact. When he writes of bees or flowers, of automobiles or of high explosives, he writes—even if somewhat inaccurately, somewhat mistakenly, or (as it may appear to a certain type of reader) too poetically—with the readiness and impressiveness of a man well informed, a man of very respectable liberal culture. And it is so because Maeterlinck attaches to science a supreme importance for our present age. The subjugation of the kingdom of matter is our immediate and pressing mission. As the sciences that we already possess advance, and sciences just now dawning or not yet even surmised win more power for us, more ground against the internal evils of our society which spring from our prodigious ignorance, we shall draw nearer and nearer to that state of freedom in which we may devote ourselves to the strong and untroubled study of the spiritual truth constantly hinted to us by our "unknown guest," our inner self.

For Emerson science sometimes holds a broad interpretative interest, but never a fascination. Thoreau with his large and intuitive, almost boyish curiosity, is probably more closely allied to Maeterlinck in this respect than any other American man of genius in the field of literature. They are both wonderingly fertile in notions of the correspondence between what would certainly appear to be the spiritual forces in plants and animals and those in man. Maeterlinck finds in flowers an intelligence, an imagination, a range of virtues and weaknesses, a flow of

sensibilities, a struggling grapple with the mysterious powers of the universe quite like our own, and he arrives at this belief by the avenue of scientific study. But Emerson usually thinks of Nature vaguely in the abstract, sometimes as a reflection of the soul of man, as created by the soul of man, sometimes as the revelation of God, sometimes as a kind of finite existence, limited by time and space, which the soul necessarily transcends. The relation between this Nature and science he expresses characteristically in "The Poet," one of the essays included in the volume bearing Maeterlinck's introductory praise of the American mystic. "The Universe," he says, "is the externization of the soul. Wherever the life is, that bursts into appearance around it. Our science is sensual, and therefore superficial. The earth and the heavenly bodies, physics, and chemistry, we sensually treat, as if they were self-existent; but these are the retinue of that Being we have. . . ." Science "always goes abreast with the just elevation of the man, keeping step with religion and metaphysics; or, the state of science is an index of our self-knowledge. Since everything in nature answers to a moral power, if any phenomenon remains brute and dark, it is because the corresponding faculty in the observer is not yet active." Hence it is only the inspired, the intuitive scientist who is of value. "The poet alone knows astronomy, chemistry, vegetation, and animation, for he does not stop at these facts, but employs them as signs." Science is an excitant to the inner vision. It helps the soul to know and to speak the universal language of Nature. And thus Emerson expresses one of the ideas that motivate *L'Oiseau Bleu*. "We fill the hands and nurseries of our children with all manner of dolls, drums, and horses, withdrawing their eyes from the plain face and sufficing objects of nature, the sun, and moon, the animals, the water, and stones, which should be their toys." Like Goethe, Emerson approaches science as the poetic philosopher; Maeterlinck approaches it partly in the same spirit, but also with a trained intellectual grasp of its working methods, with a certain capacity for seizing and pursuing its logic, and with a practical relish for its specific data.

The optimism of Maeterlinck, furthermore, springs largely from his growing confidence in the power of science to bring man

ever more swiftly to that point where he may begin to understand and master the spiritual truths that lie beyond the reach of any imaginable science, whether or not it depend upon the rational sense. He repeats again and again, both in his later plays and in his essays, the conviction that we are already on the very threshold of discoveries which will render us masters of the material world, that will create for us the wisdom to foretell the future, that will free us from all dominion of the past, and that will perfect the intercommunication of soul and soul. Emerson's optimism, on the contrary, is a sort of broadly religious trust in the operations of the Over-Soul, in the vaguely ascertainable tendencies of men to recognize the universals that fill their particular beings. "Emerson's systematic benevolence," says Arnold, "comes from what he himself calls somewhere his 'persistent optimism'; and his persistent optimism is the root of his greatness and the source of his charm." All good lying within the mind and heart of man, it is but necessary that he should find and release it. "The good man," Emerson preaches with typically romantic eloquence, "has absolute good, which like fire turns everything to its own nature, so that you cannot do him any harm." This is a part of that law of compensation which keeps all forces in proportion. Hence Emerson has no fear of evil, no terror of sin. Professor Santayana explains that the "habit of worship" which he inherited from his Puritan forebears "survived in Emerson as an instinct" after the positive beliefs of his vigorously righteous progenitors "had faded into a recognition of 'spiritual laws.'" At any rate it is the irrefragable sense of spiritual law which makes him placidly confident that the ugly and the evil are negligible because always conquerable by the beautiful and the good. Maeterlinck beholds evil as an omnipresent and dangerous force, though a force that has its roots wholly in men's ignorance. His early plays picture the somewhat vaguely externalized souls of men, women and children coping helplessly with evil incarnate or with annihilating Death. His later plays and his essays are intended to reveal how these ever watchful enemies may be defeated, how their destructive power may be transmuted into good. But Maeterlinck never has the charm of Emerson,

nor is his optimism the primary source of such charm as he has. He possesses none of Emerson's invulnerably cheerful sanctity, and it is not so much by a prophet's exciting and liberating ideas as by a visionary's somewhat startling images that he illuminates his dramas and his discursive prose.

Partly, no doubt, because of the relation between his optimism and his studious respect for the ways and ends of science, Maeterlinck's prescriptive suggestions as to means of curing specific social diseases and upbuilding individual health are less wary, more outspoken, and more concretely and deliberately interested than those of Emerson. Both these amateur philosophers are aristocrats who subscribe to democratic ideals, but Maeterlinck is much the more ready and explicit champion of the broad socialistic ideal: our unquestionable duty is to act as speedily and as unselfishly as we can in the effort to free the world of all inequalities in possession and opportunity. "To distribute happiness more equitably"—that must be our all-governing ambition. Emerson has his doubts concerning the wisdom of universal suffrage, but Maeterlinck unequivocally urges that it is the most promising experiment by which a nation, or the whole race, may explore the problem of its destiny. For such notions as vegetarianism and such slogans as total abstinence both counsellors have a tentative and temperate regard. But Emerson is generally distrustful of the increasingly numerous mechanical devices for the furthering of individual comfort and social salubrity, while Maeterlinck would encourage all those triumphantly ingenious efforts by which practical or utilitarian art and science make headway in the conquest of the material world. Emerson sounds an impatient and almost contemptuous warning against the ponderous machinery, the meddling institutionalism of modern society; pauper relief bodies, for instance, like churches and various kinds of schools, he looks upon as "yokes to the neck." "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members." This is his theory; in his daily life he is as much the reliable citizen, the good friend, the sympathetic and tactful member of his community as Maeterlinck. In neither man is there that withdrawal from the world which is the peculiar obligation, rather than the need or the preference, of

mystic or skeptic or stoic. But to Maeterlinck society is itself a most inescapable element in the working out of human destiny; our social choice lies between the extremes of anarchy and intricately scientific organization, and it is in such organization as corresponds to the infinitely complex life of external nature that our best prospects of spiritual self-knowledge disclose themselves.

This attitude towards society enforces and dignifies Maeterlinck's highly romantic but finely measured reverence for women. It is a reverence similar to that discriminatingly felt and profoundly expressed by John Stuart Mill, though not so striking as Mill's, for the English thinker is a man of hard principles and grimly reasoned theories, while the Flemish poet is a man of delicate sensibilities and chivalric impulses. It is a reverence also that harmonizes with the vigorously revolutionary and impartially analytical respect paid to the mind and soul of woman by George Meredith. The author of "Modern Love" and *The Egoist* persuasively insists that the "Comic Spirit" which animates the truest, the most unadulterated criticism can thrive only in a society of cultivated men and women, a society of equal intellectual privileges, equally and reciprocally exercised. Maeterlinck trusts largely to the superior insight, the superior spiritual appetite of woman, for the progress of the race towards the complete mastery of its fate—he trusts to this as much as to the ever growing and fresh blooming powers of science. Not only do women have the mystic sense in richer proportion than men, but they employ that sense, that vision, with less effort, with less interference from the distracting cross-play of reason and sentiment. They are nearer to the heart of being. In Emerson the same wisely romantic assurance finds expression, though with no such frequency or emphasis. When truth is in the air, he says, "the most impressionable brain will announce it first, but all will announce it a few minutes later. So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour." And in a familiar passage that illustrates his gift for fusing the language of the universal poet with that of the New England householder he speaks thus: "Let the great soul incarnated in some woman's form, poor and sad and single,

in some Dolly or Joan, go out to service, and sweep chambers and scour floors, and its effulgent daybeams cannot be muffled or hid, but to sweep and scour will instantly appear supreme and beautiful actions, the top and radiance of human life, and all people will get mops and brooms. . . ."

In general, Emerson's critics find him wanting in passion. "He conceived of himself," says Mr. Brownell, "as a passive medium of transmission for divine messages to humanity." "His nature was flooded with light, but it lacked heat." Yet there are times when Emerson does glow with an intensity of feeling commensurate with the swift intensity of his thought, as in the touching *Threnody*, and there is perhaps a revelation of the inner romantic heart of the man in his persistent liking of Beaumont and Fletcher. He could say that he had never heard of a crime which he might not have committed. And it is true that, in spite of his doctrine that "love, which is the deification of persons, must become more impersonal every day," he could understand with a delicately humorous tenderness the beauty of youthful love between the sexes. "Life is an ecstasy," declares this serene intellectualist. "We know what madness belongs to love,—what power to paint a vile object in hues of heaven." Not even Meredith in the famous lyrical chapter of *Richard Feverel* that celebrates the glory of youth's supreme hour can surpass by much the singing sweetness of that essay on "Love" in which Emerson describes the "celestial rapture." Though this essay was not included in the volume of translations for which Maeterlinck wrote his introductory eulogium, yet he must have read it and caught the gentle flavor of its eloquence. But to Maeterlinck romantic love is almost from the beginning what it could never have become to Emerson—the highest means of revealing mystically the "inexhaustible" and "unfathomable" beauty of the inner spiritual vision. The "eternal triangle" holds a fascination for Maeterlinck the dramatist because it offers the best opportunity to visualize with quick and stunning veracity the struggle in human souls between the lucid perception that alone can control fate and the pitiful, the tragic blindness of our common ignorance. The pathetically disillusioned little Sélysette, the suddenly awakened and dauntless Monna Vanna,

the divinely illuminated Mary of Magdala—these heroines, Maeterlinck would have us see, are spiritual victors because in them love is lighted by that wisdom, that understanding which is the purest insight of the soul. Maeterlinck is like Ibsen in so far as he is a visualist, possessing the ability of the artist to embody ideas in adequate form, who is intent on an ideal of freedom for the individual, especially the individual woman, from the bonds created by a society darkly fearful of its safety. Love is to him a various and impassioned study in the romantically imaginative concrete; to Emerson it is a single and relatively unemotional study in the abstract. In the mind of the one it creates a series of dramatic pictures, in the mind of the other a current of ideas.

Here is the chief difference between these two “interpreters.” Maeterlinck is almost always the conscious literary artist; Emerson is almost never so. Yet to Emerson belong a charm and a power that Maeterlinck very rarely attains, if at all. A possible way of putting it is to say that the American has compelling and permanently persuasive genius; the Belgian, engaging and temporarily impressive talent. The sincerity of the one is no more questionable than that of the other. The mysticism of each is of a high intellectual temper, free (except in the case of some of Maeterlinck’s too symbolical plays) from troublesome obscurity and from emotional eccentricity. Both writers have the intensity that is the most indispensable ingredient of literature, and both have a certain breadth of appeal, though to a limited audience. Both speak to the heart of man as well as to the mind. And the convictions—even the utterances—of the one are at not a few points almost identical with those of the other. But a different kind of light flows about Emerson from that which shines in the pages of Maeterlinck. The “lucid freedom” that Arnold admired in the New England sage whom he dared to criticise with disinterested candor—the “dignity, delicacy, serenity, elevation” of this unpretentious prophet of “cheerfulness and hope” are never to be found in the same measure in the poet, dramatist, and essayist who began his career under the spell of the ill-poised and too fantastic Symbolists. To read Emerson is to enter reverently into the presence of a strong man who is competent—in Huxley’s phrase—“to spin the gossamers

as well as forge the anchors of the mind." Maeterlinck is, at any rate, not an interpreter who will forge anchors for the mind. One does not follow with reverence what the enthusiastic reviewers of his earlier work called his "febrile" and "lissome" style, but with a continually reinforced delight in its bejewelled luxuriousness, and a refreshing pleasure in its body of imaginatively colored ideas. In a word, one is pleased by Maeterlinck, but moved by Emerson. The essays of this calm American writer are animated by more surprise, more connotation, more play of thought itself than are the essays of this elegantly adventurous European. There is never any hint of the hyper-æsthetic in the tone of the culture behind Emerson's prose and poetry, but one is sometimes conscious of such an enfeebling quality in the prose and the drama, especially the drama, of Maeterlinck. The raciness, the occasional salty humor, the spontaneous suddenness of pat and curiously unbookish allusion that lead the reader on from one agglomerate paragraph to another in Emerson are totally absent from Maeterlinck. It is as inconceivable of the author of *Monna Vanna* and *La Mort* that he should keep a journal for half a century as that a Father Taylor should find in him a resemblance to Christ. Maeterlinck can be almost wholly explained; about Emerson there will ever remain a charming and venerable residuum of the inexplicable.

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